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Prevent Leafrollers on Your Cannas

by Lydia Holley

Every season brings something to do in the garden. For those that get busy, ignoring the garden can have varying degrees of significance. Last year, I felt the need to cut back on the time spent on my garden, and I chose to disregard some chores. Unfortunately, there were some surprising consequences to that decision.



One of the chores I ignored last year was cutting down and removing dead canna foliage. It seemed logical to me that the canna foliage would freeze and form a natural mulch. This seemed like an easy chore to neglect. That was a decision I have come to regret.

Early in the summer, I noticed there was something wrong with my cannas. Their leaves stayed rolled up, not unfurling as they should have. Some leaves were visibly eaten, some were shredded as though clawed by a bear.

A little research led me to the culprit: the lesser canna leafroller (*Gesha cannalis*). There is also a larger canna leafroller (*Calpododes ethlius*). Both can cause damage to cannas, although the lesser canna leafroller is more predominant in Texas, and is what I had in my garden.

Lesser canna leafroller caterpillars eventually turn into a brown moth. The caterpillars can be controlled through a variety of methods - Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), chemical systemic control, or planting cultivars that show the promise of being resistant. According to one trial, tall cannas that had red or orange flowers, or cultivars with red foliage, were the most susceptible to leafrollers. The cultivars that had the best results had pink or yellow blooms, with green foliage.

However, the best control is also the easiest: cutting down and removing the foliage each winter. This is one lesson I learned the hard way, but it is definitely a lesson that will be remembered. I have already cut my cannas down to the ground this fall, and the foliage has been removed. I am now looking forward to having beautiful, leafroller-free cannas next summer.

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